

Composting

Let's talk about it...

Backyard Composting

What and Why

- Composting is managing the natural recycling system of decomposition which converts organic material into humus
 - It benefits you, your town, and the environment
 - Reduces the garbage that is sent for disposal resulting in reduced disposal costs
 - Saves you and your town money in reduced soil purchases
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Other benefits

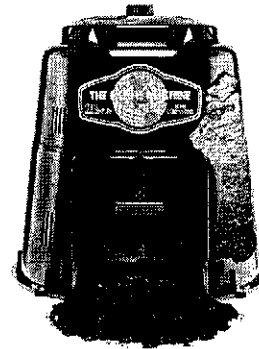
- Produces valuable soil supplement by enriching the soil – it adds essential nutrients, improves soil structure, increases moisture and nutrient retention in the soil. Plants love compost!
- It's one way you can help the environment while converting your organic waste into a resource – turning your spoils to soil

General info

- Enclosed compost piles are preferable to open piles
 - keeps out pests, holds heat and moisture in, and have a neat appearance
 - In urban areas, a rodent resistant bin must be used
 - (A secure cover and floor and openings no wider than one half inch)
 - Set up bin in a convenient, shady area with good drainage
 - A pile that is about 3' x 3' x 3' helps maintain heat generated by the composting organisms throughout the winter
 - Although a smaller pile may not retain heat, it will compost
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Choose what works for you

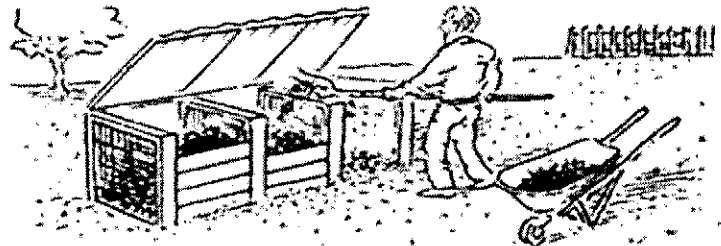
- Purchase a compost bin or build one made of wood, wire, pallet, concrete blocks, or just use a garbage can with air holes drilled in and a lid
- One good opportunity - You can order a bin, upon availability, from the Town of Wellfleet at a reasonable price and it looks like this:



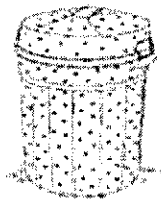
- An average household can compost at least 500 pounds of organic material each year in this bin

Bins you can make yourself

Turning Bins



A series of three or more bins allows you to make compost in a short time by turning the materials on a regular schedule.

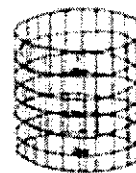


Barrel Bin

These bins can easily be made from plastic garbage cans.

Wire bins can also be made for composting.

Wire Bin



Who does most of the work?

- **“Compost Critters”** – bacteria, molds, fungi, earthworms, and insects – do most of the work of composting
 - “Compost Critters” live in soil and decomposing organic matter
 - Introduce them to your pile by sprinkling a few shovelfuls of garden soil after every 12” of fresh material
 - If you don’t have garden soil, use decomposing leaves or partially finished compost instead
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Food Web of the Compost Pile

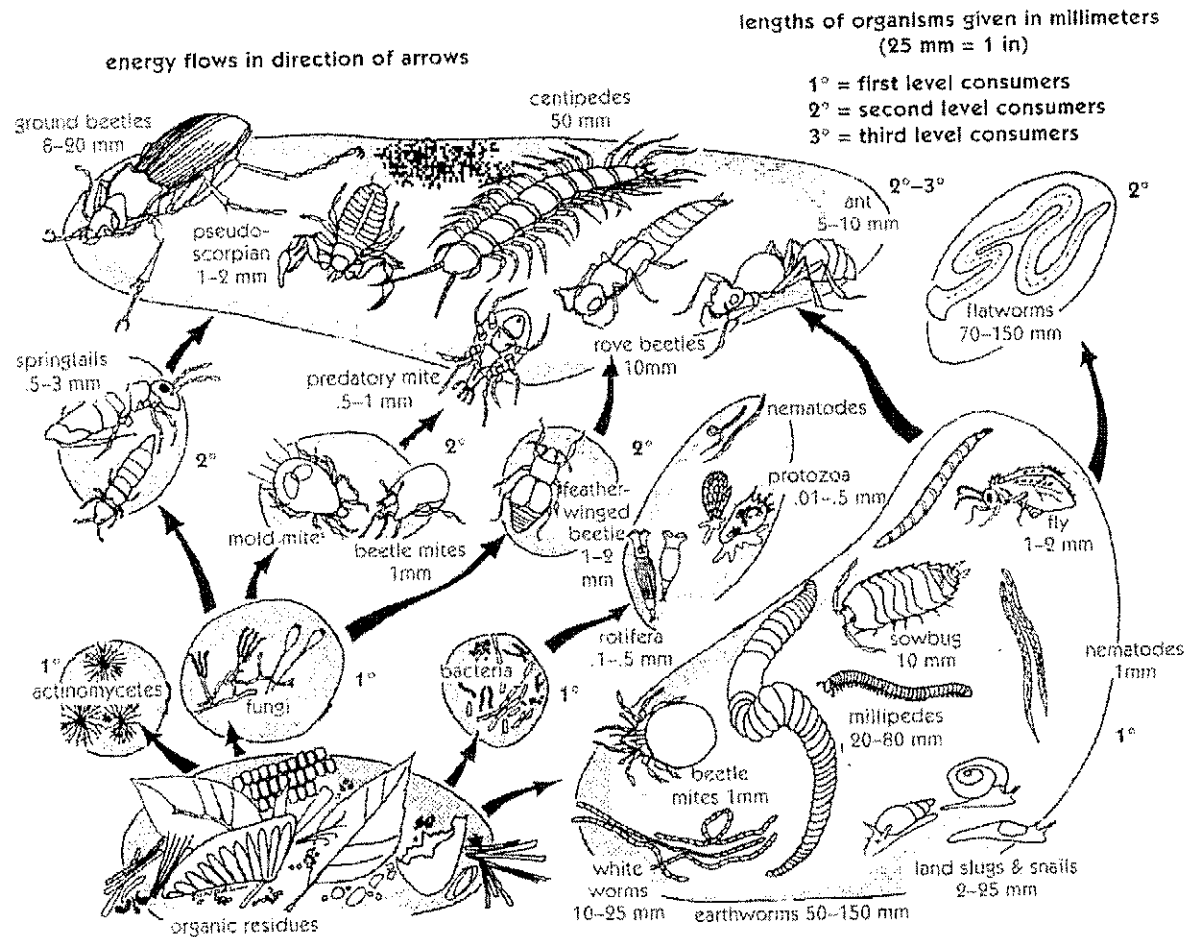


Figure 3.1 Soil organisms and their role in decomposing residues. Modified from D.L.Dindal, 1978.

Compost Critters

They need what we need...

- Food, Air, and Water
 - Food for compost critters:
 - Our organic “waste” materials – leaves, grass clippings, fruit and vegetable scraps, etc
 - “Browns” = woody materials such as leaves, straw & paper products (high carbon)
 - “Greens” = moist materials such as grass, fruit & vegetables (high nitrogen)
 - Try for a “recipe” of 3 parts “Browns” to 1 part “Greens” to prevent odors
 - A pile of “Browns” only is fine; a pile of “Greens” only gets stinky

also...

– **Air**

- Compost “critters” need oxygen (like we do)
- Lack of oxygen slows down the composting process and causes odor
- Turn, fluff or stir the pile occasionally
- An alternative to turning – build air passages into the pile with coarse materials (like straw, woodchips, stalks) or a perforated pipe

and...

– Water

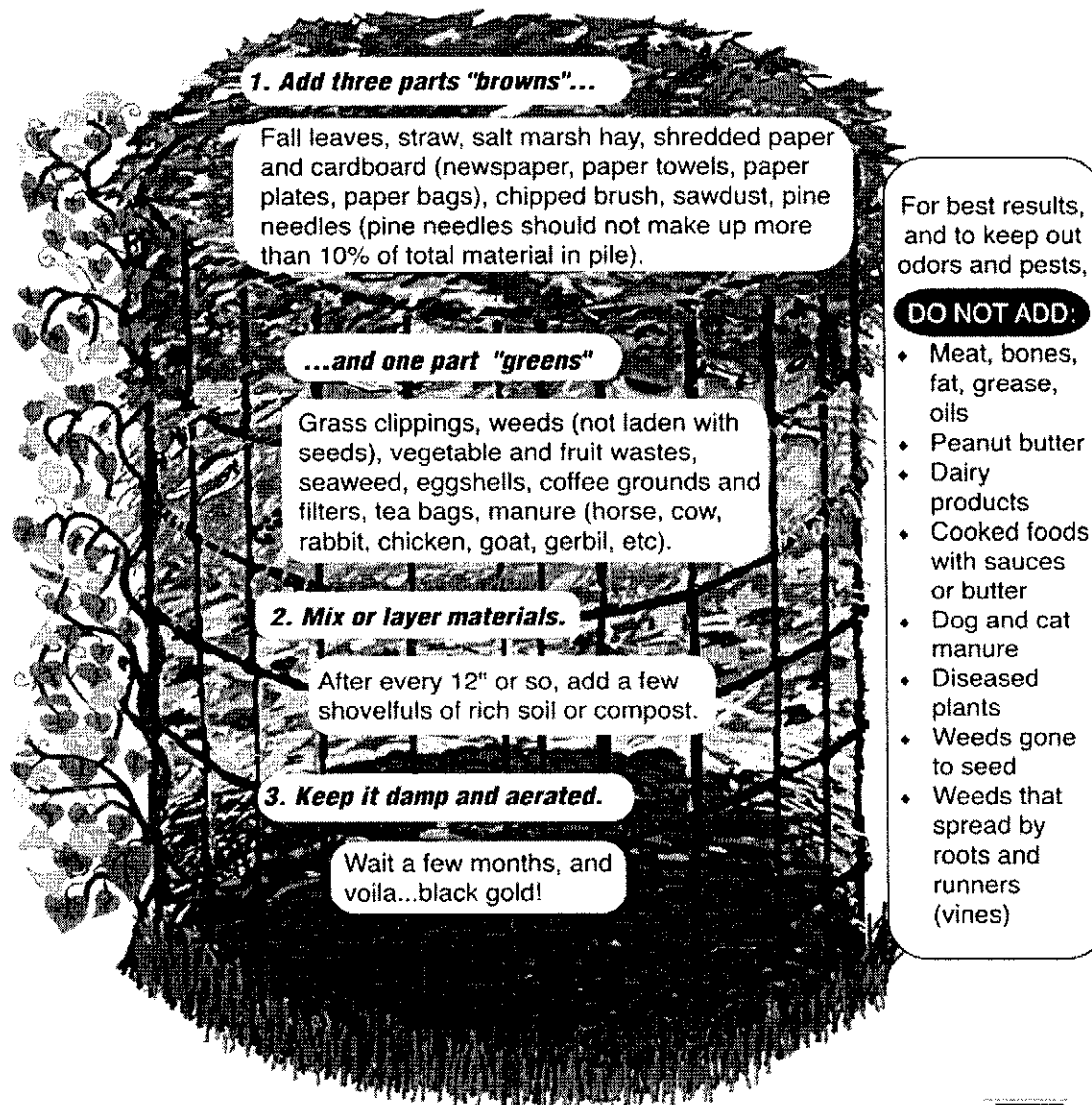
- Keep the compost material damp (like a wrung out sponge) If it's dripping wet, decomposition will stop and it can become smelly
- If the leaves in your pile rustle when stirred, they're too dry
- Replace moisture as needed with rain, snow or the hose – remove the cover when it rains or snows, or drill holes in a solid cover

What not to add...

- For best results and to keep out odors and pests do not add:
 - Meat, bones, fat, grease, oils
 - Peanut butter
 - Dairy products
 - Cooked foods with sauces or butter
 - Dog and cat manure
 - Diseased plants
 - Weeds gone to seed
 - Weeds that spread by roots and runners (vines)
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Composting is easy!

To make compost, just follow these simple steps:



Getting Started

- Set up bin in a convenient, level area with good drainage
 - in sun or shade
 - If your bin comes with instructions, follow them for best results
 - Simplest method:
 - Fill bin three quarters full with damp leaves and bury food scraps under the leaves for the next 6 months
 - Make sure leaves are damp when added or they will not break down. It's tough to dampen the lower layers of leaves in a dry pile. *(Tip! Collect leaves for composting after it rains)*
 - Sprinkle garden soil or compost (finished or partially finished) after every 12" of fresh material
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More Tips for Success

- If composting vegetable scraps, bury them in the center of the pile
 - If composting grass clippings, stir them into the leaves
 - If you don't have leaves, substitute pine needles, hay/straw, ripped up newspaper, paper towels, sawdust or any other "Browns"
 - Turn or stir pile when burying food scraps – once a month, once a season, or once a year (frequent turning speeds the process - but is not required)
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and...

- A full bin holds the most heat – fill it up in the fall and try to keep it full during cold weather
- Keep a few bags of leaves on hand to add throughout the year as needed
- If you don't have leaves, a bale of old hay or straw near the bin makes a convenient source of "Browns"

When is compost ready, and how do I get it out?

- Compost should be ready to use in 6 months to a year
 - – it will look like dark, crumbly, brown soil
 - Finished compost will be at the bottom of the pile
 - Small amounts can be harvested out the little door of the Earth Machine (if that's the bin you use)
 - For large amounts, lift the bin up off the pile, push aside top layer of material, remove the finished compost underneath
 - Refill bin, starting with the unfinished compost you removed from the top layer
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Is there an even easier way to harvest compost?

- Adding another bin or two makes harvesting compost easier
- After filling your 1st bin for 6 months, start a 2nd bin – fill that one for the next 6 months
- Your 1st bin will now have mature compost ready to harvest and use – you can start refilling it while your 2nd bin “cooks”
- Continue to alternate bins, adding new material to the “fresh” bin while letting the other “mature”
- This system works well with whatever style of compost bin you use

How do I use my “Black Gold”?

- Compost is excellent for reseeding lawn and can be spread 1/4 inch deep over entire lawn to rejuvenate the turf
 - Spread compost on bare patches in lawn before reseeding – seeds will germinate faster and establish quickly
 - Make organic potting soil – mix equal parts compost, sand, and loam. You may screen it to remove large particles – these can go back in the compost pile
 - Compost can be added directly to houseplants as need to top off and rejuvenate potting soil
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No yard to put a bin?

- If you have no yard for a compost bin, try indoor composting with red wiggler worms helping out
- Make a worm bin!
- But that's a story for another day.

If you really want to make a worm bin, see MassDEP's vermicomposting handout or check online.

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/vermi.htm>

What's the easiest way to get rid of grass clippings?

- Leave them on the lawn where they help fertilize the grass and improve the turf
 - Easier than collecting and composting them
 - *Much* easier than bagging them and taking them to the Town's compost area
 - Best of all, it's *best for the lawn!*
- Turf experts nationwide agree – clippings do not produce thatch
 - They are 80% water and decompose quickly
- Give it a try –you'll never bag clippings again!

For more information:

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/dtg.htm>

Now you know...

- Compost happens! An easy, cost-effective and environmentally sound thing to do
 - Stop by Wellfleet Town Hall for a MassDEP Home Composting brochure that includes all this information and more or visit <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/composti.htm>
 - Don't forget the Town of Wellfleet Transfer Station and Recycling Center (TS/RC) accepts yard waste for composting
 - Grass and leaves, Christmas trees, branches that are 6' long x 2" in diameter **maximum**
 - No vines, tree stumps or large timbers, please
- For more info on what is accepted at the TS/RC visit the Town's Recycling program at www.wellfleetma.org and click on the Recycling tab
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